

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY: AN ANALOGOUS ACCESS TO AUGMENT HIGH

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ABSTRACT

The Human race fails primarily to trace the real value of life. People are just following and leading life as per social stigmas and norms. They fail first to be human and adhere more to gender, caste, creed and religion. Rationally, in reality, religion gives us tenets of freedom to practice unified code of religious and pious human values through different religious books, gods and goddess. Whereas, on the above spirituality believes in the development of soul's innermost power to realize one's true potential. Even apart from being an adult, religion and spirituality are always criss-cross together, people, leader, masses are fanatic, and propel despicable violence in just one blow. The above mentioned paper lays out clear cut fragmentation, that how religion and spirituality are different from each other and if adhered properly they can pave to the development of religious (moral values) and (human spirit) in case of spirituality. To explain my ideas I have taken one religious text: Valmiki's *Ramayana* and Sri Aurobindo's '*Savitri*' where there is sequential and transcendental development of human spirit.

KEYWORDS: Religion, Spirituality, Valmiki, Aurobindo

INTRODUCTION

The New World.....(?)

The World is in chasm

The fragments are broken

The peep is deep inside the wall

Hey! Hail to this new world.....

This new world is governed

by ailing humanity....

Who.....

bleeds profusely,

their blood are oozing from every nook and corner

and-

Alas-

they look for savior

It's not today's **Aasa Ram Bapus**,

But,

Its core values bounded by practice,

bounded by religion

and

bounded by spirituality

Alas! Who is the savior?

(Composed by Me)

It ever hit my mind, to tag the question of religion and spirituality, when bounded together can pave for the proliferation of mankind. The notion of religion and spirituality always augment us as they are two sides of the same coin. Now, let us begin, with what in a simpler term is religion?

Religion Defined

In a simpler term a religion gives us some valuable ethical, moral and civilization tenets to mankind to how they can lead their life peacefully and be feel one with 'God'. Apart from, this the religious core angels are imparted in religious texts, as we can see from Valmiki's *Ramayana*, which gives us priceless crux of godly qualities.

Coming to Etymology, Religion is generally interpreted as variously organized beliefs about the relationship between natural and supernatural aspects of reality. The word 'religion', is sometimes used interchangeably with faith and belief system. There can be categories even as:

Ethnic Religion: Related to particular ethnic group

Comparative Religion: They have divided religious beliefs into philosophically defined categories called 'world religion' even sometimes referred as transcultural / international faith.

New Religious Movements: who recently developed faiths, further more there are various religious group: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, African Religion (where people follow traditional beliefs of people in Africa)

Nevertheless, these layouts give us a formulative concept of religion. The second sub-section which is additional is how religion is being understood by a few acclaimed personalities in India and Abroad.

To, begin with, Swami Vivekananda, who asserts that the basic aim of religion is to bring peace to man. Vivekananda realized the nature of man, according to that mankind in the whole world has been trying to look beyond in the quest of his ultimate destiny, therefore the whole community is expecting a religion, which is acceptable to the whole world. Humanity in the society with different social organizations are representing different needs of the man. The various world religions have been indulging in mutual criticism, vilification, and persecutions. We can see in the world several religions claiming universal empire in the field of religion over all mankind and engaged themselves in ruthless wars and bloodshed to achieve this end. To quote in the words of Vivekananda,

‘We must understand all of those religions have proved their strength, their worth, and their necessity for mankind’.

(S.Tapasyanand.p.28)

And religion is a direct transcendental experience of the ultimate reality. The idea of realization is common to all religions. “Religions are different forces in the economy of God, working for the good of mankind.”

(The Completed Works of Swami Vivekananda, p.365)

Coming to the next are the views of Mahatama Gandhi, Mahatama Gandhi believes religion is to me reality, what water is to the seed that is sown in the soul. Just as the seed is choked under the earth, when it is not duly watered, so too the morality which is devoid of fertilizing influence of religion. As Gandhi said,

The various religions
Are different roads
Converging on the same point
If we follow different routes
Provided we arrive
At the same destination.

Even Gandhi viewed religion as,

‘If we are to respect other’s religion as we would have them to respect our own, a friendly study of the world’s religion is a sacred duty. My respectful study of other’s religion has not abated my reverence for, of my faith in, the Hindu scriptures. They have broadened my views of life.’ 3

(Young India, 2.09.26)

At the same time he also said, “I reject any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality.

(Young India, 21.07.20)

On the **broader perspective Abraham Lincoln**, an American President said remarkable lines in one of his speech on October 16, 1854 at Peoria, Illinois. To quote in the words of Lincoln,

“Near 80 yrs ago we began by declaring that all men are created equal; but now from that beginning we have run down to the other declaration, that for SOME men to enslave OTHERS is a ‘sacred right of self- government.’ These principles cannot stand together. They are as oppose as God and mammon; and whoever holds to the one, must despise the other.”

The Role of Religion

Our current civilization is experiencing global scale crisis calling for a change. The role of religion in today’s society should be to help and heal the individual, when individual are healed, families are healed and so is society.

Most of the problems of today's society can be healed through following religious codes. Though it has weakened overtime, in society religion plays the role of guidance without it mankind would be nothing more than animals. The role that religion sometimes plays in society is evidence by all the animosity, bigotry and intolerance in the world today. Religion has a very powerful influence in economies and politics. It can be very effective and rewarding tools in the hands of shrewd individuals.

This animosity is abundantly evident in the Middle East and the Civil Wars in India and Sri Lanka and Pakistan. The acts of terrorism against Americans are also evidence of religious bigotry. Some religious leaders can be seen using their religious fallacies to enrich themselves and to manipulate others to satisfy their selfish endeavour. There are religions where acts of bigotry, barbarism, oppression and terrorism have become less prominent than they were in the times of the vicious religious invasions. There is still evidence of religious bigotry in judicial, educational and functional establishments in many countries around the world. There are many countries around the world where religion governs the legislative framework and the mechanism of the state and is therefore used to oppress and persecute those who do not conform to the economically superior dogmas.

There is an abundance of evidence in many societies worldwide, where religious bigots persecute men and women because of their sexual or racial preference. They also oppress some individual's right to terminate unhealthy, unwanted and unaffordable pregnancies. There are also religious cults that control economies, drugs and weapons.

Religion and today society should not be separated because religions play a very important role in bringing the society in unity, mutual co-operation, understanding and peace in the society. When we have a problem or violence in the community, we deal with religious term and could solve many problems in a peaceful way. Many destructive things are avoided through the role play by religion. Every member who is aware of their respective religion can think positively and can build a healthier society. A community where there is no religion is at risk of problems and challenges whereas a community or a society will be of more joyous and peaceful. Religion is very much the same today as it was when at the beginning. It serves to manipulate people to fanatically accept theological concepts that have no actual evidence that can be proven beyond doubt.

It therefore conflicts with other equally fabricated theologies from other groups causing hate and war. Religion has the greatest value for the leaders of each group as it gives them power to control the belief and actions of large groups of people that can be manipulated to serve their personal financial agendas. Religion continues to play on human fear of death as a most effective tool for keeping them obedient to the set of social rules created by the men (Gods) that rule over them to keep their actions confined to that of a herd of cows. Religion is an inspiration for human behavior. Sometimes it contains rules for behavior. It teaches the tenets of the faith. Religion is supposed to be a positive force in the society and will inspire good works and make people feel informed and part of the group.

To Quote from Valmiki's Ramayana

The *Ramayana* and its protagonist Rama of the Ikshvaku Solar Dynasty are inseparable from the life of Hindus. The *Ramayana* of Valmiki embodies eighteen rare, desirable qualities and have invigorated Indians. The compelling appeal of the *Ramayana* is its morally uplifting inspiring heroic story which is projected by the personality of the protagonist Rama.

Rama as the descent/incarnation of the supreme Vishnu, is the object of **devotion** (*bhakti*). Ramachandra Shukla (1958: 56), while introducing the *Bhakti* (devotional) era of Hindu Literature, say that a figure or personality who could instill **hope** and **pride** in a Hindu nation whose, ‘heart had become devoid of pride, self-esteem and hope.’

Rama was considered as *maryadapurushittam*-(Exemplar of decorum) through example who could rescue and uplift the despondent Hindu. This re-energised Hindu society reminded of past glories, much like Hanuman, needs reminder of his prowess. Even, Tulsidas, *Ramcharitmanas* became a catalyst for transformation and religious tolerance in the North. Even, Tamil poet Kamban *Ramayana* is avidly studied by all. Richman (2001: 18), describes the wide appeal of Ramayana of Kamban both in Hindus and Muslims. The Ramayana flowed from India to various part with its own interpretation- Cultural to South, south to East Asia, literary to the West. Even Tukaram and Kshetrayya said, ‘it is a simple fact that Hinduism as a living practice would not be what it is if it were not for the devotional practices. (Doniger 2010: 551).

The Ramayana/ Rama Ethos were found across the linguistic groups. The Hindus had the influence of Goswami Tulsidas, ‘Ramcharitmanas, the Telugus were conversant with Ramayana through the **Bhaskara and Ranganatha** Ramayana and the Tamils had the Kamban Ramayana. The figure and divine potency of Sri Rama were assimilated into the religio-cultural and daily life of all Hindus who had access to Ramkatha through regional language variants/adaptations.

- Sri Rama has been **friend** and **protector** as well as loving God of the Hindus.
- The Rama Ethos and the **Ramcharitmanas** fostered **Unity** and **Equality** through the grace of Sri Rama.
- Their journey (Rama, Sita and Lakshman) creates hope and **solace**, that Lord of Three world had gone through hardships.
- The image of Sri Rama and his unrelenting struggle against adversity and evil while upholding righteousness (**Perseverance**)
- Rama as a **Leader** and **Humane**.
- The whole creation of Rama was the elimination of Ravana. Rama is **Virtuous, Pious, Powerful**. Whereas Hanuman lies in **strength, dutifulness, and of Sita in Loyality, pativatra**

Spirituality Defined

In a simpler term, spirituality comes from the term ‘spirit’, which means ‘soul’. It means evolution and development of human spirit or evolution of ordinary human spirit to a higher cosmic level to attain the purpose of human life. All spiritual practices aim at purifying the ego-centeredness, and direct the abilities at the divine reality. Spiritual practices may include meditation, prayer, ethical development and so on.

The essence of spirituality is the search to know our real self, to discover the true nature of consciousness. (Peter Russell, Power of Now).

To add more, Spirituality can be defined as, ‘the ongoing endeavour to grow in our relationship with God. As Sri Aurobindo argues that man is born an ignorant, divided, conflicted being, a product of the original in conscience

(unconsciousness), inherent in matter that he evolved out of. As a result, he does not know the nature of reality, including its sources purpose, his own nature, including the parts and integration of his being, what purpose he serves and what his individual and spiritual potential is, amongst others. In addition, he experiences life through divisions and conflicts, including his relationship with others, and his divided view of spirit and life.

To overcome these limitations, Man must embark on a process of self-discovery in which he uncovers his Divine Nature.

Sri Aurobindo on Spirituality

To that end, he undertakes a three-step process, which he calls the Triple Transformation. It is described in Book II, Chapter 25 of his opus *The Life Divine*.

Psychic Transformation: The first of the three stages is a movement within, away from the surface of life, to the depths, culminating in the discovery of his Psychic Being (the evolving soul). From that experience, he sees the oneness and unity of creation, and the harmony of all opposites experienced in life. As a result, he begins to shed his essential Ignorance born of creation. He also experiences his true individual nature, shedding his ego and sense of separateness from other and life. He also begins to glean his true individual purpose, as well as his universal and transcendent purpose in life. He comes in touch with an inner Guide that constantly indicates what actions to take and what to avoid. As a result of connecting to the transcendent divine, he experiences a deep pleasure and bliss, causing him to want to surrender to the Divine Will and Intent.

Spiritual Transformation: As a result of making the psychic change, his mind expands and he experiences knowledge not through the hard churning of thought, but through light, intuition, and revelation of knowledge, culminating in supramental perception. Light enters from the heights and begins to transmute various parts of his being.

Supramental Transformation: After making the psychic and spiritual change, he makes the supramental and most radical change. Sri Aurobindo says the mind cannot easily perceive this possibility, as it goes beyond past spiritual principles and experiences. It is basically a complete transformation of the mind, the heart, the emotions, and the physical body. Consciousness and Force are reintegrated in the being that were lost in the involution of consciousness from an infinite Reality that began in creation as matter. He also has ultimate knowledge that is matched by a power for its effectuation. Thus, Knowledge and Will become fused and one. Whatever he perceives is able to manifest as a reality, reflecting that same power in the original Reality and Being from out of which the universe manifest. At that point, he has the Vision of Brahman that perceives the integral unity of spirit and Life. That spirit is the source of life, and that life is a manifestation of spirit in an ongoing, endless, integral process. The supramental transformation culminates in the change in the very cells of the body, ushering in a new form of human, devoid of the functioning it now exhibits, replaced by their spiritual equivalents. It is the ultimate transformational change. At that point, a Gnostic being is fully realized, as is a collective, Divine Life on earth.

I even like what **Steve Earle** said about religion:

To me, religion is an agreement between

A group of people about what is God

Spirituality is a one-on-one relationship

The famous benevolent Guru **Mother Teresa** viewed religion as:

We need to find God and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence, See how nature-tree, flowers, grass-grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence...we need silence to be able to touch souls. At a more broader perspective in Abroad, the famous American prose writer Emerson gave his tenets about religion in his Transcendentalism philosophy which imbued the world with congruence between a higher realm of spiritual truth.

How Spirituality is being Understood?

By spiritual wellbeing we generally mean '*a sense of good health as a whole person and as a unique individual*'. This is a process of growth and development, often over a long period of time, as we learn to feel at ease with who we are and to fulfil our potential as individuals, as human beings. Good spiritual health can bring with it a sense of inner peace and comfort.

There are a wide range of spiritual practices and activities which can promote and enhance wellbeing, such as belonging to a faith community, symbolic or ritual practices, meditation, prayer, retreat, pilgrimage, reading scripture, playing or listening to sacred music, Tai Chi, yoga, activities such as group sports which involve the fellowship of participants, and engaging with and enjoying the arts and nature.

Evidence of the benefits for engaging in such practices is growing, with some of the advantages identified as:

- An awareness and fostering of values such as patience, honesty, kindness, hope, wisdom, joy and creativity
- Enhanced confidence and self-esteem
- Improved relationships
- A new sense of optimism about life, together with a sense of inner peace and acceptance of problems we face in life
- Faster recovery from illness or bereavement.

Meditation is a state of concentrated attention on a particular thought or awareness. It is an important part of spirituality for many and is central to many religions. Siddhartha Gautama, a spiritual teacher from ancient India said to have founded Buddhism, was 'enlightened' while meditating under a tree. From that moment, thanks to his meditation, it is believed that Gautama had complete insight into the cause of human suffering and how to eliminate it.

Role of Spirituality

A Spiritual Community can Improve your Life

Many spiritual traditions encourage participation in a community. Spiritual fellowship, such as attending church or a meditation group, can be sources of social support which may provide a sense of belonging, security, and community. Strong relationships have been proven to increase wellbeing and bolster life expectancy, which is perhaps why one study found a strong association between church attendance and improved health, mood, and wellbeing.

Spiritual Strength can Help you Overcome Hardships

Dr. Steven Southwick's book, *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges*, describes how some people overcome trauma—such as abduction, war, and imprisonment—by seeking comfort in spirituality or religion. He gives examples where spiritual people find ways to “meet the challenge and continue with purposeful lives...they bounce back and carry on.”

Having a strong spiritual outlook may help you find meaning in life's difficult circumstances. Southwick describes the story of a woman who overcame the post-traumatic stress following an abduction and rape by believing that her trauma “served as a platform for her personal development, forcing her to evaluate her life and gradually change it for the better. She credits her ability to move forward with her life...to her dedication to spirituality.”

The spiritual practice of recognizing the interconnectedness of all life can also help buffer the pain that comes with difficult experiences. Researcher Kristin Neff says that “if we can compassionately remind ourselves in moments of falling down that failure is part of the shared human experience, then that moment becomes one of togetherness rather than isolation. When our troubled, painful experiences are framed by the recognition that countless others have undergone similar hardships, the blow is softened.”

Spiritual People Make Healthier Choices

Adhering to a particular spiritual tradition may bring an indirect health benefit because many traditions have rules about treating the body with kindness and avoiding unhealthy behaviors. Research shows that perhaps because of these tenets, people who practice a religion or faith tradition are less likely to smoke or drink, commit a crime, or become involved in violent activity, and they are more likely to engage in preventative habit like wearing seatbelts and taking vitamins.

Spirituality May Help you Live Longer

An exhaustive review that compared spirituality and religiousness to other health interventions found that people with a strong spiritual life had an 18% reduction in mortality. Giancarlo Lucchetti, lead author of the study, calculates that the life-lengthening benefits of spirituality can be compared to eating a high amount of fruits and vegetables or taking blood pressure medication. Although some researchers have suggested that the extent of spirituality's benefit on health is exaggerated, most researchers agree there is a positive relationship between religious and spiritual practices and better health outcomes.

Forgiveness is Good Medicine

Letting go of blame, and negative feelings after a hurtful incident is a practice that is reflected by a number of spiritual traditions, including Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism. Modern science shows the health benefits of forgiveness are numerous: better immune function, longer lifespan, lowered blood pressure, improved cardiovascular health, and fewer feelings of anger or hurt.

To Quote from Sri Aurobindo's ‘Savitri’, as a Transformation of Consciousness

As we read and try to understand Sri Aurobindo's works, especially three of his major works, *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, and *Savitri*, vis-à-vis the ancient spiritual texts, the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Gita, we tend to

conclude that only he offers humanity redemption from the clutches of suffering, and even death, with the ransom of his great *tapasya* and its fruit of transformation. Whereas our past prophets and seers have given the solution of the world-riddle outside life and the world by escaping into *nirvana* or *moksha*, Sri Aurobindo presents the solution in the thick of life. Sri Aurobindo promises to take us to the land of “the Lover’s everlasting Yes”, where we can be fully liberated from the snare of Ignorance and transformed while living still in the midst of life.

The means he presents to us for that cosmic journey is the transformation of consciousness, a radical change of our human nature into a divine nature, a complete reversal of our ignorant life into a divine life. This theme is the base and central idea of all his works, especially in the three books mentioned above. *The Life Divine* explains the theory, the rationale, the possibility of a divine life on earth against all scepticism and criticism. *The Synthesis of Yoga* is the manual, the guide map of practical steps across the uncharted route of transformation. *Savitri* is the drama of the actual enactment of transformation through the medium of mantric poetry played by cosmic actors Ashwapati, Savitri, Satyavan, and the Lord of Death.

I feel the book under review, *Transformation of Consciousness in “Savitri”* by Dr Kalpana Bidwaiker, presents a harmonious fusion of the main aspects of Sri Aurobindo’s thought currents: the Real-Idea of a divine life, the *dynamis* of the integral transformation of human consciousness into divine nature. Sri Aurobindo has created *Savitri* not for the sake of poetry, but as a means for expressing his adventure of consciousness, his ascension to the highest peaks of existence. Such poetry is mantric, carrying the power and the force of the Spirit. It is indeed the poetry of the future. All the methods and conditions followed by him in the composition of *Savitri* have been laid down in his visionary and critical literary work. In order to create such a poetry man must grow in consciousness, break the limitations of his mind, life, and body, undergo the disciplines of the Integral Yoga, and step into the shoes of Savitri and Ashwapati. This is the message of *Savitri*. And this very message is the theme of the book too.

Unless we fully comprehend the concept of involution and evolution, the possibility of the transformation of man into superman remains untenable. Sri Aurobindo is the first thinker and scientist of consciousness, the first cosmologist to tell us in clear intelligible words the secret of the evolution of the world. The Divine or the Spirit is involved in all things of the phenomenal world. The portrayal of the title theme, the transformation of consciousness in *Savitri*, in three successive chapters towards the end of the book. According to Sri Aurobindo the complete and radical transformation of man can be achieved by following a spiritual discipline in three stages: psychic transformation, spiritual transformation, and supramental transformation.

The first step is achieved by finding one’s soul or psychic being, which is generally hidden behind the outer veils of mind, life and body, the surface actors under a shadowy entity called ego. The psychic being is a spark of the Divine, the indwelling God in the heart of man – that evolves from birth to birth and at last is capable of taking up the reins of man’s life and executing the will of God through its instruments. While the process of the psychic emerging as a master and ruler – can take a long time in the normal course of things, it can be accelerated by yoga and the result achieved in a relatively shorter time, even in a single birth.

In the epic *Savitri*, this psychic transformation has been exemplified or enacted by the heroine Savitri. In fact, Savitri is not an ordinary evolving human soul who needs to undergo this kind of spiritual exercise. She is already divine, the incarnation of the Divine Mother. But she has consented to come down to help and guide the human race in

answer to the prayer of Ashwapati, the representative of mankind. She has taken birth and accepted the human ignorance and suffering in order to hew a path for man to a new life, a higher life. This calls for her to undergo the process of soul-finding, or the psychic transformation, in order to regain her lost divinity. She hears the inner voice:

“For man thou seekst not for thyself alone.

Only if God assumes the human mind

And puts on mortal ignorance for his cloak

And makes himself the Dwarf with triple stride,

Can he help man to grow into the God.

(Savitri, Book –VII, Canto-III, p.488)

Accepting his darkness thou must bring to him light,

Accepting his sorrow thou must bring to him bliss.

In Matter’s body find thy heaven-born soul.”

(Savitri, Book –VII, Canto-III, p.488)

Savitri plunges deep into yoga until at last she meets her secret soul. The author explains:

Savitri realized in her being the oneness of the *Jivatman* and the soul and it was the moment of the highest communion in her. The development of the psychic and the governance of the psychic on its instruments is of utmost importance in the integral transformation. The whole being has to rise higher in consciousness and, the higher has to descend into the lower for its transformation. The psychic change makes the being ready for the ascent and descent of consciousness for a spiritual transformation. Savitri too after having realized the psychic transformation, experiences a descent of the Divine Mother in her being.

The spiritual transformation is, according to the author, exemplified or enacted in the epic by Ashwapati, the human father of Savitri. He too undergoes a severe *tapasya*:

Ashwapati takes up the *tapasya* and journeys towards the ascension of consciousness in order to redeem mankind from its present crisis. This ascension of consciousness to the higher realms and the descent of higher consciousness in one’s being is what Sri Aurobindo called the spiritual change. The spiritual transformation or “the spiritual change is the established descent of the peace, light, knowledge, power, bliss from above, the awareness of the self and the Divine and of a higher consciousness and the change of the whole consciousness to that.”

Even the spiritual change cannot entirely transform the ignorant nature. Sri Aurobindo has discovered a new dynamic power of the Divine called the **supermind**, which has the power to radically transform the nature. That power has been brought down into the earth-nature by Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s joint *tapasya* for the first time in the spiritual history of mankind. According to Sri Aurobindo’s vision and his subjective experience of that power, the supermind is already at work and will change in due course the face of the earth and consequently man, by a rapid evolution or revolution, will be either transformed or replaced by a superior species called superman, or a divine man with a divine mind, life and body. The supermind alone can act with full power on the obscure physical plane:

“The supermind shall claim the world for Light
 And thrill with love of God the enamoured heart
 And place Light’s crown on Nature’s lifted head
 And found Light’s reign on her unshaking base.”

(*Savitri*, Book-XI, Canto-I, p.707)

The supramental transformation is not represented in *Savitri* as the other two stages of transformation are, for it is the vision of the future. But this vision is vividly depicted in the poem:

“When superman is born as Nature’s king
 His presence shall transfigure Matter’s world:
 He shall light up Truth’s fire in Nature’s night,
 He shall lay upon the earth Truth’s greater law;
 Man too shall turn towards the Spirit’s call.

(*Savitri*, Book-XI, Canto-I, p.708)

The Spirit shall take up the human play,
 This earthly life become the life divine.”

(*Savitri*, Book-XI, Canto-I, p.710)

Then, in the end the book dwells on the rich spiritual import of the epic, which will serve as humanity’s guide and help towards the creation of the future man. *Savitri* is not only Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual autobiography but also his spiritual body, and it radiates his physical presence and power.

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